

there could be amendments with regard to the marriage penalty legislation. I hope we can reach an agreement on how that would come up. Then on Wednesday and Thursday, we would debate the alternatives and we would have a vote. But it is long overdue.

I hope we can do as we did on the Social Security earnings limitation. We passed it unanimously in the Senate. A lot of people said: Oh, gee, that was so easy. Why didn't you do it before? We have been talking about it for 20 years. We couldn't get it done.

They said it cost too much or that senior citizens didn't really need it or it was a part of a package. But for some reason or another—for years and years—it did not happen. Finally, we isolated it, passed it clean, and passed it overwhelmingly.

The President had a big signing ceremony last week saying: Finally, we have eliminated the Social Security earnings test. Good. The main thing is our seniors who are between 65 and 69, who want to continue working without being penalized in their Social Security benefits, are going to have that opportunity.

But I think the same is true here. It is clear now we have isolated it. The marriage penalty tax is not connected to incentives for people to adopt children. It is not connected to the death tax or the estate tax. It is not connected to anything else. We are just going to have a debate about the marriage penalty tax. Senator HUTCHISON of Texas and Senator ASHCROFT of Missouri, and a number of other Senators on both sides, are going to say: We ought to do this. This is the way to do it.

But in the end, this is the point: We are going to see this week if the Senate is for eliminating the marriage penalty tax or not.

The guy in the store where I was shopping is going to have a list of the names of those who vote against it. I hope the Senate will step up to this and that we will begin the process of totally eliminating the marriage penalty tax.

Then, finally, on the budget resolution, I hope we can get a final agreement on the conference report and that we will pass it before the end of the week so we can go forward with our appropriations bills. That is a very important part of what we need to do this year; that is, pass the 13 appropriations bills for Agriculture, for defense, for the Interior, and for all the various Agencies and Departments of the Government, and more importantly for the American people.

We ought to do it earlier than usual. There is no reason why we should wait until June or July to do the appropriations bills. Let's get started in May. Let's move them earlier. That is where we can include things that we think should be done.

For instance, on the foreign relations bill, I think we should provide aid for Colombia to fight the narcoguerrillas

and try to get control of that drug war there. I think we ought to do it, and do it on the foreign relations bill.

With regard to Kosovo and defense, the first bill that comes along, whether it is MilCon—military construction—or the defense bill, I hope we will add that additional funding. This budget resolution conference report will get all of that started.

Then I think important, once again, is, we should give credit to the Budget Committee and to what we are doing in the Congress as a result of this budget resolution. No. 1, for the third year in a row, we have the ability to have a balanced budget—3 years running now. Before that, we had not had one since 1969. Yet this year we have the ability to do that for a third time, and to protect every cent of the Social Security trust fund income. Every cent that comes in from FICA taxes will be preserved and set aside and will not be spent on other Federal Government spending programs.

I do not know exactly what that amount would be for the coming year, but it would be significant. I think maybe the figure is approximately \$160 billion, or something close to that. But over a 10-year period, it will be \$1 trillion. By not spending it, that is good for the program, it is good for technology, and we can pay down the national debt.

Over a 3-year period now, I understand we may have reduced the national debt by somewhere more than \$300 billion. A lot of people never thought they would see the day come when we would actually begin to pay down the national debt.

If we stay on the path we are on, if we stay on the trajectory we now see with technology—and a lot has to happen; we have to have good fiscal responsibility, monetary policy, stable energy prices, right across the board—but if those things will stay within the ranges we are looking for, we could reduce completely the national debt by the year 2013 or 2015. That has not been done since Andrew Jackson was President of the United States. That is really an amazing thing.

If we can continue to keep in place policies by congressional actions, and by monetary policy, and by the administration, and see economic growth year after year of around 4.5 percent—and in recent years it has been more than that; but just 4.5 percent—it would have a tremendous impact on the economy and the explosion of revenue coming into the Social Security trust fund.

When we come to the point, over the next 2 or 3 years, where we are going to have fundamental reform of Social Security, to make sure it is preserved, protected, and, as a matter of fact, it is there for our children and our grandchildren in a way that will be meaningful to them, just that growth in the economy of 4.5 percent will give us the options we need to have a very strong program that will go not just into the

year 2040 but go throughout this century.

I think these are very important issues. This is going to be an interesting week to have debate. When we complete that budget resolution, it will be a very positive action and will set the course for not only this year but well into the rest of this decade.

Mr. President, I have been looking forward to this opportunity to have this debate and have these votes this week. I look forward to that process as we go forward.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to restore the remaining, I believe, 15 minutes of the hour that was reserved on the Democratic side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

GAS PRICES

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President I enjoyed listening to the majority leader. I have always worked well with him, although we have different perspectives and a different philosophy and opinion on some issues. I have worked with him both in the House of Representatives and here in the Senate. When I listen to him I am always reminded why I have always liked him personally. He is a good person. I appreciate his public service.

There are some things on the agenda, however, that we might not agree about. I want to comment about a couple of those issues, especially with respect to an agenda item this week dealing with the repeal of the 4.3-cent-a-gallon gas tax, which is set for a cloture vote tomorrow afternoon here in the Senate Chamber.

My expectation is that the cloture vote will fail. I am not certain of that, but that is my expectation. Just hearing some of the comments and some of the statements that have been made previously, I expect that cloture vote will fail, and I think justifiably so.

Let me describe why.

I think the price of fuel in this country is a pretty tough pill for the American people to swallow. What has happened is the price of gasoline has spiked up. It is not because the free market has caused that. It is because we have a cartel called the OPEC countries that are limiting production and increasing the international price for their product.

That is not the free market. That is monopoly pricing. They have the strength and, I guess, the opportunity to do that. What they have done is, of course, impose a significant new charge on American families, on family farmers, producers, manufacturers, drivers, and others.

There was no vote on that. That was something the OPEC countries did. We

didn't have a chance to discuss that or vote on it in the Congress.

The question I ask with respect to the repeal of the 4.3-cent gas tax—which is, after all, rather small in the scheme of what has happened to the price of gasoline—is who would get the benefit of that? Is there a guarantee of any kind that the American people would actually get the benefit of the gas tax reduction? The gasoline tax is not imposed at the pump. The gasoline tax is imposed up the line. There is no guarantee at all that if the Congress would repeal the 4.3-cent gasoline tax, that that savings wouldn't simply be blended into the profits of the large oil companies. There is no guarantee that the American driver is going to pull up to a gas pump and find that gasoline prices are 4.3 cents a gallon less.

The other question is, What is going to happen to make sure we continue the building of the transportation infrastructure, roads and bridges, the programs we have already approved in the highway program that are done with this money? I am told by some: This money will be made up from the general fund. Where from the general fund? Where do we get that money? How do we know that will be the case?

Someone once said you should never buy anything from somebody who is out of breath. There is a kind of breathless quality about bringing this bill to the floor of the Senate to repeal the 4.3-cent-a-gallon gas tax.

One of the reasons we heard Members stand up last week and ask some very tough questions about this is, most of them understand, this is kind of an immediate, quick reaction that hasn't been thought through very well. It will not necessarily provide any relief to drivers. There is no guarantee this 4.3-cent-a-gallon reduction is going to show up at the pumps.

Secondly, where is the money? Where are we going to make up the money? Which roads aren't we going to fix or which bridges are not going to be repaired? Those are questions that need answering this week. Because they cannot be answered, I think the cloture vote will fail.

I think this is a pretty good discussion we are having with respect to energy policy. The majority leader indicated this country doesn't have much of an energy policy. I don't quarrel with that. We haven't had much under any administration, as a matter of fact. We are far too dependent on foreign sources of energy. There is no question about that. But in many ways this is a helpful discussion because we have had the discussion in recent years about the globalization of our economy. How can one stand in the way of the global economy? We are told this economy is a global economy. Understand it, they say.

Well, where are people going to produce energy in this world? In a global economy, they will produce energy where it is least expensive to produce. You can bring up oil under the sands in

the Persian Gulf for a fraction of the cost of bringing up oil in the United States. That is the global economy, I guess. That is a decision the global economy helps make.

The majority leader asked the question—I think a very important question—do we have a national policy with respect to energy and our desire to be somewhat independent of foreign sources? That is a good question not just for oil. It is a good question for steel and for a whole series of things we know are important to the American economy.

We have been told until this time there is nothing that is more important than globalization of our economy; if steel moves and is produced elsewhere, so be it. Do the people who say that feel the same way about oil? Because that is where we are. The oil we consume is produced elsewhere. We now discover that when a cartel manipulates artificially the price of oil by restricting supply, Americans get overcharged. That is part of a monopoly in the global economy that we do not control.

We need to do a lot of things. This administration is proposing something I hope the majority leader and others will support in the area of domestic renewable energy. They are proposing significant new initiatives in wind energy, which I think make a lot of sense. We have new technology on wind-generation devices that is remarkable. If we put some in this Chamber on the right days, we could electrify New York.

In my State, North Dakota, I grew up walking outdoors in the morning with the wind and the breeze. If you take a map and evaluate what is the Saudi Arabia of wind energy, it is North Dakota, and a lot of other northern border States are right behind. Some will say, listening to me speak, they would have known we ranked high on wind energy. But seriously, we have an opportunity, with new technology, to capture wind energy in many parts of this country and extend our energy supply.

The same is true with biomass. The same is true with geothermal, and natural gas, which the majority leader suggested. Absolutely, we have wonderful new discoveries in natural gas and deep well finds. We are doing a lot of that.

We do need to pay attention to the development of oil and the development of coal, which are important in this country. We also need to get behind the proposals coming from the Department of Energy and this President's budget that call for the development of renewable energy resources and what is called green power—environmentally friendly sources of power. I mentioned one: wind energy. We need to fully fund these initiatives.

I hope no one comes to the floor later and says, "We really care about our energy supply," if before that time they voted against these initiatives to ex-

tend our energy supply by investing in renewable energy sources. We need to do that.

This, in many ways, is a wonderful discussion. What does the global economy mean? Does it mean we don't have to worry about dependence on anything? We are now discovering it means we have to worry about dependence with respect to oil. What about steel? What about a range of other economic activities without which a country such as ours will not long remain a world economic power? This is a great discussion to have. It is right on point and right on time.

Yes, it is about oil and gas, but it is about much more than that. When we have this vote on cloture on the 4.3-cent gasoline tax repeal, I hope it will be preceded by a rather lengthy discussion of a whole range of these issues. I appreciate the majority leader raising them today.

I don't intend to support cloture. As I said, there is kind of a breathless quality of coming to the floor with a 4.3-cent gas tax repeal that consumers will probably never see, even if we take the 4.3 cents off. I expect it is going into other pockets long before it gets to the consumer. If it gets done, dye the dollars green and then look around for green pockets someplace. You won't find green at the gas pumps. You will find it somewhere upstream. Some bigger enterprise will pocket that money.

MARRIAGE TAX PENALTY

Mr. DORGAN. There is no disagreement in the Senate about the marriage tax penalty, that it ought not exist. We should change it. There are several different proposals to change it. We ought to come together with respect to one of those proposals.

I will describe one approach to address the marriage tax penalty. I am going to be introducing a piece of legislation at some point in the days ahead with my colleagues, Senator JUDD GREGG, a Republican, and Senator DICK DURBIN, a Democrat, and perhaps others, that would dramatically change the income tax system in this country. This approach would eliminate for a large number of Americans the marriage tax penalty. I have been working on this a couple of years and appreciate the work of Senator GREGG and others.

Over 30 countries that have an income tax system allow people to comply with their income tax without having to file a tax return. How do they do it? They just manipulate their W-4 that is filed with the employer to provide a little more information, and their actual withholding becomes their exact tax liability—no questions. That is your liability, no return filed, no searching for records, no long line at the post office on April 15.

Our country can do that. Our country can do it in a way that will allow 70 million Americans to comply with their income tax responsibilities on April 15 without having to file an income tax return. How do we do it? You